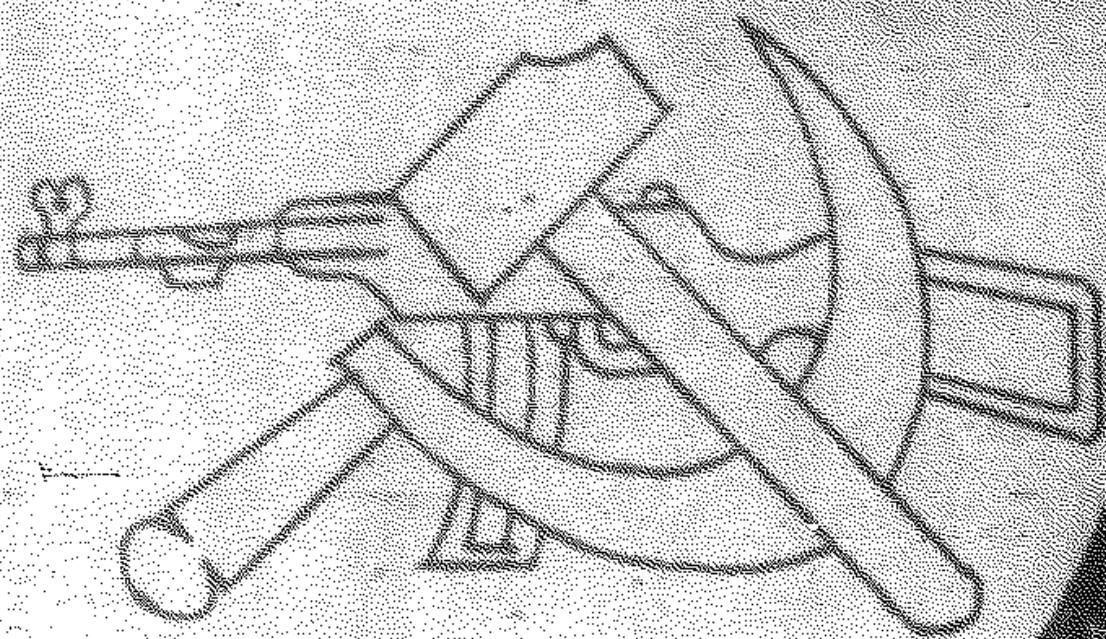


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PAHAYAGAN NG PARTIDO KOMUNISTA NG PILIPINAS
PINAPATNUBAYAN NG
MARXISMO - LENINISMO - KAISIPANG MAO TSETUNG



Bayan

Special Issue

(English Edition)

September 21, 1977

MARCOS' BOGUS LAND REFORM COLLAPSES

Published by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

MARCOS' BOCUS LAND REFORM COLLAPSES

"It's a lot of noise!"

This is how the peasant masses describe the promise of land reform made by the fascist dictator Marcos at the beginning of his antidemocratic counterrevolution in 1972.

Five years of Marcos' bogus land reform has not only failed to improve the lot of poor and lower-middle peasants who comprise the vast majority of the country's peasantry. It has aggravated their plight.

There is no known case of a poor or lower-middle peasant acquiring land under the regime's "land reform" for the simple reason that he cannot afford the price dictated by Marcos and his fellow landlords.

In fact, the peasants who were deceived into accepting the scrap of paper that the fascist dictatorship calls a "land transfer certificate" (LTC) find themselves sinking ever deeper in debt, with no hope of eventually owning the land they are tilling.

A recent seminar of the University of the Philippines focused on a "land reform" barrio in Calumpit, Bulacan. Based on the data made available to the researchers, it would seem that production costs have risen by 30 percent, mainly because of the high cost of fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation services, taxes, etc. In contrast, the palay production increased by a mere 2.6 percent.

In the average farm in the barrio studied, an equivalent of 53 cavans was spent on production. Since the yield totalled only 64.71 cavans, the peasant was left with just a little over 11 cavans, or less than P600.

Clearly, with the prices of all prime commodities skyrocketing, the peasant and his family could not live on that amount, much less meet amortization payments on the land.

Field reports by Party cadres show that actual production costs have risen many times more than 30 percent. On the other hand, palay production has been so unreliable and requires so much expense that many peasants are giving up the so-called "high-yielding" varieties.

In the Calumpit barrio, pesticides for which the peasants are required to pay prohibitive prices under the regime's "Masagana 99" program were found to be dangerous to the peasants' health and to the environment. The pesticide Polidol was banned in Japan years ago while another brand, Gustathion A, was never allowed for farming. Both brands have been killing off fish, frogs and snails that provide supplementary food for the peasants.

Confronted with this, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) pointed to the Bureau of Plant Industry as the government agency responsible. On another occasion, the DAR had tried to shift the blame to the Bureau of Lands for the failure of "land reform".

Indeed, this bureaucratic trick of buck-passing has characterized the entire implementation of Marcos' bogus land reform.

The program has been such a dismal flop that even the fascist dictatorship has lessened the volume of its propaganda on what it had pointed to as its "cornerstone". Fascist propaganda now tends to evade or obscure the issue of land reform.

On the Question of Land Ownership

What makes the Marcos "land reform" a sham from the beginning is the bourgeois reactionary idea that if the tenant masses in rice and corn lands want to own land they must buy it at the price dictated by their landlords.

Presidential Decree No. 27 stresses the point that land sale contracts must be essentially a private transaction between the landlords and tenants and even discourages the Land Bank from acting as the financial intermediary.

At any rate, whether the land sale contract be directly between the landlord and the tenant, or the Land Bank first purchases the land and then resells it to the tenant, PD No. 27 dictates a mode of land valuation and a mode of payment that put the poor and lower-middle peasants in default of their obligations as "amortizing owners".

The value of the land is arrived at by getting the average gross crop out of three "normal" crop years and then multiplying it by two-and-a-half times. To jack up the value of his land, the landlord picks out the "best" crop years or arbitrarily insists on outrightly false high production figures.

In raising the figure for the average gross crop, the landlord is not really interested in selling his land. But it is useful for him for demanding a high fixed rent (25 percent of the average gross crop) in accordance with the "leasehold" system.

In proclaiming the whole country a "land reform" area, the Agrarian Reform Code of 1971 and then Presidential Decree No. 2 pushed many tenants to opt for the "leasehold" system on pain of losing their tenancy rights for failure to do so.

Even before PD No. 27, many landlords had already compelled their tenants to sign "leasehold" contracts wherein high averages of gross crops were invented for the purpose of raising the land rent. That is what Marcos calls "emancipation" of the tenants in his PD No. 2.

Tenants who make the mistake of entering into land sale contracts under PD No. 27 are required to make 15 yearly equal payments. These payments would cover not only the basic price of the land but also interest at the rate of 6 percent a year.

Tenants who have become "amortizing owners" are also required to pay the land tax, now rapidly rising as a result of World Bank dictation. When the Land Bank acts as the financial intermediary, the "amortizing owners" are also required to pay administrative costs, not to mention the overpricing of the land as arranged by the landlord and the Land Bank officials.

PD No. 27 also requires the "amortizing owners" to become members of the "samahang nayon" (village association). This association is supposed to be their guarantor. Again they are subject to heavy financial obligations in this Marcos-imposed association.

Under PD No. 27, the poor peasants and even all middle peasants who are tenants have absolutely no chance to be able to meet all the expenses required each year in connection with the land sale contract.

The poor and lower-middle peasants are pinned down by an accumulation of debts and always end the year in debt. They have to sell their labor power to supplement their income from their plots.

Certainly, they cannot gain anything from entering into any land sale contract. There is as yet no known case of a poor or lower-middle peasant daring to enter into any direct land sale contract with his landlord under PD No. 27.

It is only in an extremely small number of cases, where the Land Bank acts as the financial intermediary, that poor and lower-middle peasants are trapped together with the rich peasants in land sale contracts under the terms of PD No. 27.

The records of the Land Bank show that the poor and lower-middle peasants are always in default of their payments. Failure to pay means the piling up of interest upon interest.

Even without having to pay for obligations under PD No. 27, the peasant masses are already pinned down by the rising costs of production and subsistence and are liable to be pinned down harder by illness in the family, natural calamities and the unreliability of the so-called "high-yield" varieties of seed.

Marcos' "land reform" does not only amount to zero but worsens the lot of the poor and lower-middle peasants. It is too much to say, like some officials of the U.S. Agency for International Development (A.I.D.), that this bogus land reform is "not even one percent fulfilled". It is also gratuitous to say that it is "moving slowly" as if there were still some hope in it.

What is land reform if it is not for the masses of poor and lower-middle peasants? They are the tillers who need to own their plots but cannot afford to buy them.

Data from the DAR covering the period 1972-1976 show up the big lie that Marcos has dished out to the peasant masses.

Under the pompous signboard of "Operation Land Transfer", the DAR distributed 321,700 LTCs, covering 398,458 hectares, to 229,341 tenants out of an acknowledged number of more than one million tenants on rice and corn lands.

These LTCs are mere scraps of paper informing the tenants that they can buy land from their landlords in accordance with PD No. 27 by either entering into a direct land sale contract with their landlords or having the Land Bank act as the financial intermediary.

Also under the deceptive catchphrase of "Operation Land Transfer", the DAR is supposed to organize the barrio committees on land production (BCLPs) to determine land prices on the basis of production figures, in line with the formula set by PD No. 27. According to the DAR, only 9,698 BCLPs were organized from 1972 to 1976.

The cards are stacked against tenants in transactions within the BCLP, whose composition is dominated by landlords and bureaucrats. In most cases, the landlords use the BCLP to falsify production figures upwards not only to set a prohibitive price on the land but also to demand higher rent. In other cases, the landlords simply boycott the BCLP after one token meeting.

Of the 5,671 BCLPs which submitted land valuations, the DAR cared to respond to only 3,271 with a mark of approval. But valuation of the land mainly by landlords is one thing and the tenants' ability to pay for the land is another.

There are land sales through the Land Bank where the tenants belong to various peasant strata. The DAR claims that for the period 1972 to 1976 it effected land sale contracts involving 1,449 landlords; 30,109 tenants; 57,459 hectares; and a total land value of P403,159,322.54.

These figures actually include land sale negotiations and contracts made even before the fascist martial rule. Premartial law figures are included obviously to bloat the number of tenants and the hectarage and also to lessen the price per hectare involved in Land Bank-undertaken land sale contracts during the fascist regime.

The picture is ugly, notwithstanding the attempts to prettify it. It is no achievement to subject 30,109 tenants on only 57,459 hectares to an average price of P7,016 per hectare, excluding payments for interest, administrative costs and land tax.

The average farm size for the tenants is 1.87 hectares. Basic price is P13,120. By one reckoning, interest payments come up to P11,808, at the annual rate of 6 percent for 15 years. Thus, basic price plus interest charges add up to P24,928 for only 1.87 hectares.

Based on the government's figures, the average gross crop from this average lot is valued at P5,248. This is incredible. Actually the yield is only about P3,000. The overpricing through connivance between the landlords and the Land Bank officials is very obvious.

The average "amortizing owner" has to pay annually P1,661.81 for a period of 15 years for the basic land price and interest charges. In addition, it has to pay for administrative costs and land taxes which come to another large amount.

What about obligations to the "samahang nayon"? What about production expenses and living expenses, at a time when the crisis generated by U.S. imperialism and the Marcos fascist regime is daily worsening? And what about such unexpected events as illness in the family or crop failure (ordinarily once every three years)?

In the period 1972-1976, the DAR issued a grand total of 983 "emancipation patents" to 576 tenants on 562 hectares. The recipients of these "patents" had started to pay the Land Bank for the land a long, long time before the fascist martial rule and even before the entire Marcos regime.

They are actually rich peasants or even up-and-coming small landlords or peasants and nonpeasants who draw income not only from the purchased land but also from other sources. They are the small number of people who could pay their way through previous land sale contracts arranged by the Land Bank.

The basic orientation of PD No. 27 is to keep the tenants at the mercy of the landlord class. In the main, the mode of valuation dictated by this decree has been used by the landlord class to impose higher land rent and intensify feudal and semifeudal exploitation.

Though greatly increased, the financial resources of the Land Bank are geared to supporting the more profitable agricultural and nonagricultural ventures of the comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlord class.

Landgrabbing by the big bourgeoisie (including foreign firms), big landlords and big bureaucrats and the establishment of "corporate farms" are rampant. The "land reform" propaganda of the Marcos fascist regime has always tried to obscure these acts.

An increasing number of peasants and even poor settlers and national minorities are being displaced or dispossessed either under the Marcos program of encouraging modern plantations for export crops or under General Order No. 47 which pushes the big foreign and domestic corporations to engage in modern rice and corn production and organize "compact farms".

Moreover, military campaigns and infrastructure projects displace and dispossess so many peasants, including poor settlers and national minorities.

The Marcos fascist regime is antagonistic to the peasant masses who engage in self-organization and who demand merely the reduction of land rent and the elimination of usury.

In most areas of the country, the old feudal sharecropping arrangements are still in operation, despite the redundant proclamation in the Code of Agrarian Reform of 1971 and PD No. 2 that these be abandoned in favor of the "leasehold" system throughout the country.

Under the "leasehold" system, the tenants now called "leaseholders" are obliged to pay an exorbitant fixed land rent to the landlord.

The "leaseholders" shoulder all production expenses. They are obliged to pay the fixed rent whatever is the outcome of the crop. Oftentimes, this system of land rent is even worse than the traditional sharecropping arrangement where the landlord shares in production expenses and gets his crop share from actual production.

"Samahang Nayon", "Masagana 99" and Other Projects

"Samahang Nayon", "Masagana 99" and other projects are integral parts of the entire deception program of the fascist dictatorial regime of the U.S.-Marcos clique on the land question.

Tenants who wish to become "amortizing owners" under the terms of PD No. 27 or those, including nontenants, who wish to get loans under the "Masagana 99" program are obliged to join the "samahang nayon".

Right from the start, the "samahang nayon" was projected as a precooperative association leading to a fullfledged cooperative and was pointed to as a guarantor for land sale contracts between landlords and tenants.

"Samahang nayon" has actually been an anticooperative association. It has been used as a pretext for the dissolution of privately initiated cooperatives and the repression of legitimate peasant associations.

It could not even pretend to take care of the marketing problems of the peasant masses. The National Grains Authority always sets the prices of grain at a level far below the price spiral of nonagricultural commodities needed by the peasants.

It is largely in connection with "Masagana 99" that peasants of all strata and nonpeasants, including landlords, have had to join the "samahang nayon". Hundreds of thousands became members in a few tens of thousands of "samahang nayon" in 1973 to 1974 so as to acquire seeds, fertilizers and pesticides under the "Masagana 99" program.

The superfluity of "samahang nayon" as a possible "credit cooperative" became obvious when the rural banks turned them into mere guarantors for loans taken by people of all sorts.

At the peak of "Masagana 99" lending, the "samahang nayon" was a mix-up of landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and even "ghost peasants" invented by the bureaucrats to be able to pocket funds for themselves.

"Samahang nayon" started to collapse, especially in 1975, when fertilizers and pesticides became available outside of the "Masagana 99" program and when "Masagana 99" borrowers refused to pay their debts and resented having to pay for all sorts of obligations in the "samahang nayon".

"Samahang nayon" has always been regarded by the peasants as nothing more than a fund-collecting agency for the Department of Local Governments and Community Development. There is no benefit in return for the funds collected. The funds simply go up the bureaucratic ladder for misappropriation.

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The peasant masses are resentful that for nothing in return, they have to pay to the "samahang nayon" entrance and annual membership dues, 5 percent of every loan that they get from government lending institutions for a so-called barrio "savings" fund, one cavan per hectare for a so-called barrio "guarantee" fund, fines for nonattendance or tardiness in meetings and so many others that may be arbitrarily decided by running dogs of the fascist regime.

The tenant masses are aware that should any of them commit the mistake of entering into any land sale contract under PD No. 27 or through the Land Bank and they are in default in payments, it is the "samahang nayon" that takes over the land and further imposes financial obligations on them.

"Masagana 99" is camouflaged usury. It is far worse even than the usury undertaken by private moneylenders. The peasant masses would not have gotten into it, were it not for the exclusive channeling of agricultural chemicals into this program.

The acknowledged interest rate on "Masagana 99" loans is 12 percent. The agricultural chemicals and seeds distributed to borrowers by the rural banks are greatly overpriced and are usually in excess and unsuitable to their lands.

Fertilizer is not only overpriced. In many cases it is substandard. "Bad order" or spoiled fertilizer is mixed with new stocks and sold to the peasants. At this writing, spoiled fertilizer is flooding Nueva Ecija and is certain to cut down rice production in that province.

Moreover, the borrowers are obliged to form or join the "samahang nayon". As already pointed out, obligations under the "samahang nayon" come to a huge amount.

To be in good standing with the "barangay" or simply its captain who must endorse the loan application, a borrower also has to contribute to the "barangay fund" and pay some other fees concocted by the "barangay".

There are also the work hours lost and the food and travel expenses in going to town repeatedly to follow up the loan application. And of course, there is the allotment for bribing the farm technicians who process the loans.

The peasants are also subjected to outright swindling, as in one recent case in Mindoro Oriental where they are victimized by a syndicate of rural bank officials and government farm technicians. The syndicate made off with at least P200,000.

The peasants were made to appear to have borrowed P4,500 to P5,500 each, but were given only P200 to P500 each.

The obligations are so heavy that at least 40 percent of "Masagana 99" borrowers have not been able to pay their loans. These are mostly poor and lower-middle peasants.

In the Calumpit barrio cited earlier in this article, the "samahang nayon's" membership of 143 decreased to only 57. Uncollected "Masagana 99" loans totalled P130,000. The record of "samahang nayon" and "Masagana 99" was even worse in the neighboring villages in eastern Bulacan.

Only the rich peasants and landlords seem to be able to pay up. But many even among them refuse to pay. Like the poor and middle peasants, they say that for one to pay would be to make a fool of oneself.

The poor and lower-middle peasants are refusing to pay any part of their "Masagana 99" loans, especially in areas where the New People's Army and the peasant associations are campaigning for nonpayment. Token payments are made only to get new loans. In refusing to pay unjust debts which were forced on them in the first place, they are also denying revenue to the reactionary government. "Anyway, that money will be used against us," the peasants say.

The Marcos fascist regime has failed to make the peasant masses pay up even as it has repeatedly threatened them with mass arrest and imprisonment. They know that there are not enough jails to keep them and not enough funds to feed them should they be taken away from their farms. Besides, indebtedness is no legal ground for imprisonment.

"If they jail all of us peasants," the barrio people also say, "who will grow palay for the rest of the country? Surely not Marcos or the rich people with him." And the women add: "If they imprison our men, we and our children will insist upon being jailed with them."

The loans made available for rice and corn production under "Masagana 99" are small compared to loans for such export crops as sugar, coconut and bananas. In the case of export crops, the big bourgeoisie (including foreign firms) and the landlord class monopolize the loans.

Though a great number of peasants of various strata were able to get small loans under "Masagana 99", the lion's share of the loans went to the landlord class and farming corporations.

"Masagana 99" has been supported mainly by the A.I.D.-instituted Agricultural Loan Guarantee Fund in line with the U.S. imperialist policy of promoting the "green revolution", selling agricultural chemicals and equipment from U.S. firms and, of course, fake land reform like that of the fascist dictatorship.

On his own, the fascist dictator Marcos devised "Masagana 99" so that his Planters Products, a corporation acting as agent of its U.S. principals, could make a killing. This corporation has monopolized the market for agricultural chemicals and jacked up the prices of these chemicals through "Masagana 99".

Upon their inability to fulfill their financial obligations under "Masagana 99" and the "samahang nasyon", the poor and lower-middle peasants cannot enter into any land sale contract directly with their landlords or through the Land Bank.

The Marcos fascist regime keeps on getting huge foreign loans for infrastructure projects among other purposes. Roads and bridges and irrigation facilities are pointed to as a support to agricultural production and the peasant masses.

The fact is that it is the imperialist banks and contractors, the fascist dictator and his henchmen and the big bourgeoisie and landlord class that are benefited. They amass profits on the projects and engage in land speculation.

The people are made answerable for the huge foreign loans in so many ways. One way is taxation. The World Bank is pushing hard for increasing the tax burden. It is unthinkable how the general run of "amortizing owners" can assume responsibility for land taxes.

The peasant masses are already groaning under the weight of rising irrigation fees. Irrigation facilities have been turned by the Marcos fascist dictatorship into facilities for further blood-sucking on the peasant masses.

In areas irrigated by the Upper Pampanga River Development Project (Pantabangan dam), for instance, the peasant masses have to suffer rapidly increasing irrigation fees. In the first year of operation of this irrigation system in 1975, irrigation fees were raised by 700 percent.

Irrigation pumps bought through loans from the Development Bank of the Philippines are overpriced. Wherever these pumps are owned and controlled by private individuals or organizations controlled by landlords or rich peasants, they are used to squeeze the peasant masses dry.

At this time of unrelenting economic crisis, generated both by the world capitalist system and the fascist dictatorship, the peasant masses are suffering even more.

Taking advantage of the plight of the peasant masses, the Marcos fascist dictatorship has been trying to inveigle them into "compact farms" and "corporate farming" contracts with large foreign and domestic corporations.

Those inveigled to agree to these "compact farms" and corporate farms have had a very sad experience. They are displaced from the farm. Only some are employed and paid low wages. Most tenants are simply driven away and even owner-cultivators do not get their due share as the capitalists manipulate the accounts.

"Palayang Bayan" and "Maisang Bayan", which are rice and corn-planting projects of the fascist dictatorship on so-called public lands, were used to drive away poor settlers and national minorities. These projects collapsed as soon as the people resisted by harvesting the crop for themselves. Rice and corn fields are the most difficult to guard after all.

Under the conditions and terms of the bogus land reform of the Marcos fascist dictatorship, the masses of poor and middle peasants can only suffer further oppression and exploitation if they do not take matter into their own hands on the line of the national democratic revolution set by a proletarian leadership.

The Party's Current Antifeudal Policy

The Communist Party of the Philippines calls for agrarian revolution as the main content of the national democratic revolution. The ultimate goal of this revolution is the confiscation of land from the landlords and the free distribution of this to the landless tillers. On the basis of the growth of the revolutionary forces, the current policy being carried out is to reduce land rent, eliminate usury and increase production.

The Party's minimum program of land reform is being firmly carried out where the people's army is operating and the peasant masses are aroused, organized and mobilized. Usually, land rent and interest rates are cut down by 50 percent at the earliest possible time under the program. Exchange of labor, mutual aid and some cooperatives are promoted.

Farm workers who are but an extension of the poor and lower-middle peasantry are also aroused, organized and mobilized. Better wages for them are arranged through the peasant associations of which they are members. Where they have their trade unions, especially in haciendas, they demand better working and living conditions and struggle against landlord and capitalist exploitation.

More and more small and medium landlords are accepting that they cannot and should not resist the Party's minimum program of land reform, especially in the guerrilla zones. Those who follow the policies of the Party may be categorized as enlightened landlords. This is particularly

true of small and medium landlords who have also become members of the national bourgeoisie or upper petty bourgeoisie, and on the basis of their class stand support the Party's anti-imperialist and antifascist line. In varying degrees, they recognize that they must make common cause with the peasant masses and the broad revolutionary movement against the U.S.-Marcos dictatorship.

The landlords who oppose the policies of the Party, the people's army and the peasant movement and act to sabotage them or bring harm to the revolutionary forces are counterrevolutionary despots who are subject to punishment. Their running dogs are also liable to be punished if they do not change their ways.

In a certain sense, the peasant masses in demanding the reduction of land rent have an advantage over the urban workers in demanding higher wages. The former have immediate access to the crop while the latter do not have immediate access to the funds held by their employers in bank accounts.

As the peasant masses struggle against the bogus land reform of the fascist dictatorial regime of the U.S.-Marcos clique throughout the country, the Party, the people's army and the mass organizations and all the revolutionary forces can advance vigorously. The peasant movement is developing rapidly as the main force of the revolutionary movement.

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